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978-1-107-09388-1 - Literature, Ethics, and Decolonization in Postwar France: The Politics of Disengagement

Daniel Just

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## LITERATURE, ETHICS, AND DECOLONIZATION IN POSTWAR FRANCE

Against the background of intellectual and political debates in France during the 1950s and 1960s, Daniel Just examines literary narratives and works of literary criticism arguing that these texts are more politically engaged than they may initially appear. As writings by Roland Barthes, Maurice Blanchot, Albert Camus, and Marguerite Duras show, seemingly disengaged literary principles – such as blankness, minimalism, silence, and indeterminateness – can be deployed to a number of potent political and ethical ends. At the time the main focus of this activism was the escalation of violence in colonial Algeria. The poetics formulated by these writers suggests that blankness, weakness, and withdrawal from action are not symptoms of impotence and political escapism in the face of historical events, but deliberate literary strategies aimed to neutralize the drive to dominate others that characterized the colonial project.

DANIEL JUST is Assistant Professor in the Department of Political Science at Bilkent University. He has published a number of articles in journals including *Modern Language Review*, *New Literary History*, *MLN*, *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, and *Philosophy and Literature*.

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### *Note on translations*

Throughout the book English translations were used whenever possible, and sometimes modified to follow original texts more closely. Where English translations were unavailable, translations are mine and references are given to original editions.